

## Counting Virtual Programming - Preliminary Definition

Discussions have begun on how to track the emergence of virtual programming with the recent stay-at-home requests. What follows is some preliminary thoughts that have been taken from other libraries in the US. Keep in mind that, unless definitions are agreed upon, we will not be counting the same thing. Secondly, the Annual Report is not intended to be the end-all-be-all of reports; it is a snapshot and helps to create a trendline for libraries across the state and across the nation.

On the Annual Report, programs are defined as *any planned event, sponsored by the library, which introduces a group of attendees to library services or provides them with cultural, recreational, or educational information.*

We classify programs by the age of the intended audience: children, young adult, or adult. Attendance at each event is tracked only by number of attendees, regardless of age.

The point of this data element is to track the library's potential to *gather people*. So to keep the count of virtual programming consistent with the annual report's definition of a program, think about whether the virtual program *gathers* people to *experience* something *at the same time*.

One great advantage about online events is that they can reach a much wider group than in-person physical programs can. For example, you might gather 15 people to watch an online storytime live, but the storytime might get 600 additional views over the next week. However, if we count on-demand views of programs as attendance, those numbers will dwarf the numbers for physical attendance. We also need to keep in mind that the tool for measuring online viewers (i.e., counting by device or IP address) is different than the tool for measuring in-person attendance (i.e., our eyes). So we need to track both separately.

### Guidance for Counting Virtual Programming

- Count a program that happens online live and in real time (streaming) or is a taped program WHEN there is a staff person moderating and/or engaging in real time as the taped program airs.
- Count each instance of a virtual program as one program. If there is a way to capture attendance of the live or scheduled event, count that as attendance. Count unique viewers, if possible, or count peak usage views.
- If your library creates a virtual program that is recorded (not live) and can be viewed at any time, *do not count it as a program for the annual report*. Instead, keep track of the number of recordings your library creates or sponsors, and the number of views of those recordings.
- Count the number of views of a recording until it is taken offline, or until the end of the year, whichever comes first.
- For live events that are recorded and available for viewing later (e.g., Facebook Live storytime), keep count of later views of the recording *separately* from the live attendee count, if possible.

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Texas State Library and Archives Commission

May 5, 2020